

Green Reform, Landscape Gardening and War Cemeteries. The Case of Leberecht Migge and Harry Maasz

Marta García Carbonero

Abstract

World War I represents a turning point in the cemetery reform process that had taken off in Germany around 1900. The "Hain" or sacred grove had been the core feature of many civil cemeteries since the opening of the Waldfriedhof in Munich designed by Hans Grässer (1860-1939) in 1907, and it initially became the leitmotiv of most soldiers' graveyards. However, this approach was reinterpreted and transformed during the war to include the functionalist and typification ideas that would eventually transform the professional debate in the interwar years. This shift is explored through the military cemeteries designed by landscape architects Harry Maasz (1880-1946) and Leberecht Migge (1881-1935).

Contents

Introduction

The Lebensreformbewegung and cemetery design

World War I German cemeteries: between functionalism and tradition

Introduction

[1] The evoking potential of landscape was thoroughly explored in the military cemeteries that were designed to commemorate the fallen of the Great War. According to Reinhart Koselleck, the high number of casualties during World War I left an obligation to search for justification that was hard to create with traditional means.¹ Thus, nature and certain landscape features assumed a new role in representing national values of all kinds, helping to mask the crude reality of war.² Though the task to honor the sacrifice of so many soldiers was broached in different ways by the fighting countries, in all of them, landscape played an increasingly important role in commemoration.³

[2] In Great Britain, the Imperial War Graves Commission tried to stress the bond to the homeland through the east-west orientation of cemeteries on the large scale⁴

¹ Reinhart Koselleck, *The Practice of Conceptual History. Timing History: Spacing Concepts*, Stanford 2002, 320.

² Georg L. Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers. Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars*, Oxford 1989, 107.

³ "All nations used their native landscape as a means of self-representation, but nature was especially important in the definition of German nationalism", Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers*, 87.

⁴ The east-west orientation of some of the war cemeteries by sir Edwin Lutyens is further discussed in Marta García Carbonero, *Espacio, paisaje y rito: formas de sacralización del territorio en el cementerio europeo del siglo XX*. Ph. D. dissertation, Universidad Politécnica

and through the use of mixed borders of native seasonal plantings on the small scale, that were to bring a piece of British landscape to the foot of those graves placed on foreign ground.⁵

[3] In Italy, the Commissariato Generale Onoranze Caduti in Guerra put forward a general strategy of gathering the remains of the fallen in a few ossuaries that were meant to be pilgrimage shrines situated in the countryside close to the places where the different battles had taken place. Placed on top of hills or mountain ridges, they should express the value of sacrifice and display a truly Italian architecture, using topography in a monumental, sculptural and narrative way. These ossuaries featured a ceremonial route aimed at flaming up the national spirit, confronting visitors with both the physical effort of the quest and the names and history of the different battles along the frontline.⁶

[4] Lacking an overall strategy like those displayed by Italy or Britain, Germany⁷ approached the issue of honoring their dead in several ways, thrust by the reform movements that had taken off at the end of the 19th century and by the wider debate on the relationship between industrialization and design that reached a crucial stage at that time.⁸ The Werkbund, for instance, dedicated its 1916 yearbook to military memorials and grave markers, while several exhibitions tried to provide a German model for burial plots both at home and at the battlefield. Again, a landscape feature such as the "Hain" or sacred forest became a popular way of honoring those who had fallen abroad. With the trees planted in a geometrical, orderly arrangement, these "Haine" would be living monuments that recalled the sacred woods worshipped by the Germanic people in pre-Christian times. According to George Mosse,

*Typically enough, in Germany the tree and the wood, rather than a flower were associated with sacrifice in war, suggesting the Germanic emphasis upon historical continuity and rootedness, which was largely lacking in England.*⁹

[5] The "Hain" had already been evoked for civil purposes at Hans Grässer's groundbreaking scheme for the Waldfriedhof in Munich (1907) and it was widely

de Madrid, 2011, 246-253 (unpublished).

⁵ See Frederic Kenyon, *War Graves. How the Cemeteries Abroad Will Be Designed*, London 1918 and Philip Longworth, *The Unending Vigil. The History of the Commonwealth War Grave Commission*, Barnsley 2010.

⁶ Anna María Fiore, "La monumentalizzazione dei luoghi teatro della Grande Guerra: il Sacrario di Repiduglia di Giovanni Greppi e Gianino Castiglioni", in: *Annali di Architettura* 15 (2003), 233-247.

⁷ As George Mosse points out, "The defeated nations did not have the money to look after war graves. In both Germany and Austria private associations took over that task, the Black Cross in Austria and the *Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge* in Germany." Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers*, 82.

⁸ See Frederic Schwartz, *The Werkbund: Design Theory and Mass Culture before the First World War*, Verlag der Kunst, Dresden 1999 and Alan Colquhoun, "Culture and Industry 1907-1914", in: *Modern Architecture*, Oxford 2002, 57-72.

⁹ Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers*, 111.

used during World War I. The sacred grove was also the model followed by leading landscape architects Harry Maasz and Leberecht Migge, both involved in the Green Reform Movement that had started to take off at the turn of the century. In their plans for military cemeteries like the Ehrenfriedhof der Marine (1915) in Wilhelmshaven or the Heldenhaine in Lübeck (1915-1917) and Bad Schwartau (1918) both authors merge the "Hain" concept with new functionalist ideas about gardening that would eventually transform the role of greenery in interwar urbanism.

[6] This article will attempt to explore how the German model of the forest cemetery - as Hans Grässel had previously defined it in Munich's Waldfriedhof - was reinterpreted in the work of landscape architects Leberecht Migge and Harry Maasz by introducing the functionalist principles of the Green Reform Movement. It will further see how war graveyards offered an opportunity to conciliate commemoration with the sanitary issues that took over the professional debate in the interwar years and how they reflect the conflict between typification and individualization that had polarized the architectural debate in Germany since the beginning of the 20th century.

The Lebensreformbewegung and cemetery design

[7] The issue of how Germany commemorated the Great War should be addressed within the context of the Lebensreformbewegung (movements for life reform) that took over German culture from the turn of the century onwards. As a reaction to the country's rapid industrialization, different citizens' associations emerged, pleading for a comprehensive transformation of all aspects of life: youth, nudism, education, religion, art, fashion, settlement, gardening, etc. The commemoration of the dead was also swept by this general concern for cultural renewal.¹⁰

[8] As a common denominator, these movements shared a longing for nature and tradition, while they all searched for Germany's roots and identity in its preindustrial values. Among the many initiatives that integrated this movement, two were especially significant regarding military cemetery planning: the Green Reform and the Friedhofsreformbewegung (Cemetery Reform Movement).

[9] On the one hand, the initiatives for Green Reform had endorsed landscaping with a more relevant role that expanded its traditional aesthetic and recreational purposes with wider urban and ecological dimensions. Following the American park system model put forward by Frederick Law Olmsted¹¹, green areas such as city parks, boulevards, playgrounds and also cemeteries were now considered elements of a larger scheme that stretched over the metropolis with a logic of its own.¹²

¹⁰ For a general overview on the *Lebensreformbewegungen* see Diethart Kerbs & Jürgen Reulecke eds., *Handbuch der deutschen Reformbewegungen 1880-1933*, Wuppertal 1998.

¹¹ Witold Rybczynsky, *A Clearing in the Distance. Frederick Law Olmsted and America in the 19th Century*, New York 1999, 285-302.

¹² David H. Haney, *When Modern was Green. Life and Work of Landscape Architect Leberecht Migge*, New York 2010, 40-43.

[10] Soldier cemeteries, war memorials and trench gardens were integrated within larger green schemes that articulated the extension of cities. Such is the case of Leberecht Migge's Friedhof der Marine in Wilhelmshaven (1915), which was part of his scheme for Rüstringen City Park (1913-1920), and his design for a Youthpark (1916) in Berlin, developed together with Martin Wagner (1885-1957), who wrote a Ph. D. dissertation entitled *Das sanitäre Grün der Städte*¹³. The Youthpark included a "Wehrgarten" or defensive garden in which young people could train their military skills in a recreated trench landscape.¹⁴

[11] On the other hand, the Friedhofsreformbewegung had been searching for new ways of burial that would represent a genuine German identity, while solving the problems of 19th century metropolitan cemeteries. These were for instance: their overwhelming size, their profane character and their chaotic appearance due to the accumulation of individual and over-monumental grave markers.

[12] Furthermore, cemetery reformers were also involved in the controversy between artistical individualization and typification that claimed for increasing attention among designers from 1900 on. The debate reached one of its most polemic peaks at the Werkbund Conference of 1914, where Hermann Muthesius pleaded for the creation of form types suitable for mass production, while Bruno Taut (1880-1938), Henry van de Velde (1863-1957) and others defended the work of art as an expression of the author's individual genius.¹⁵

[13] Much in the same way, positions were divided among cemetery reformers. Initially, the poor quality of existing grave markers was associated with industrial mass production. Thus, many associations called for the use of tombstones in soft, local stone that could be custom handcrafted by artists. However, as the century took off, typification permeated the reformers' debate and, by the end of the war, machine-polished, hard stone slabs were officially accepted in cemeteries, both as a result of the producers' lobbyism and of an increasing demand for homogenization in grave markers' designs among reformist proposals.¹⁶

[14] From 1900 on, several exhibitions attempted to provide new models for tombstones and crosses that would avoid the previous monumentalism, while architects and designers of all kinds advocated for cemeteries in which the individual monument would be subordinated to the overall effect.¹⁷

[15] Hans Grässel (1860-1946), municipal architect of the city of Munich and a member of the Heimatschutz chapter of Bavaria, was one of the first to turn cemetery design in a new direction. About 1890, he outlined a decentralization strategy for Munich's cemeteries, which provided each cardinal point with a

¹³ Martin Wagner, *Das sanitäre Grün der Städte. Ein Beitrag zur Freiflächentheorie*, Berlin 1915.

¹⁴ Haney, *When Modern was Green*, 93-95.

¹⁵ Colquhoun, *Modern Architecture*, 57-61.

¹⁶ Norbert Fischer, *Vom Gottesacker zum Krematorium. Eine Sozialgeschichte der Friedhöfe in Deutschland seit dem 18. Jahrhundert*. Ph. D. Dissertation. Universität Hamburg, Hamburg 1995, 173, 178, 180.

¹⁷ Stefan Fayans, *Bestattungsanlagen*, Stuttgart 1907.

graveyard.¹⁸ This new plan avoided the overwhelming size of previous examples and provided better access from all neighborhoods, while the new public transportation systems made it possible to place the burial sites further away from the city centre, in the untouched nature.¹⁹

[16] The Waldfriedhof (1904-1907), the last of these four cemeteries, was to become an archetype for cemetery reformers both in Germany and abroad, especially welcomed by the proponents of cremation that were in search of a suitable setting for this new funereal practice. Located on the outskirts of the city, the site of the Waldfriedhof was an existing woodland, in which Grässer used the clearings to place the tombs, while replacing the flowers of traditional grave plantings by green woodland species such as fern, moss, ivy, etc. Grave markers were strictly defined in their type, size and material by the cemetery regulations, and they were grouped by sorts and assigned to specific clearings dedicated to artists, clergymen and other social groups, so as not to visually interfere with each other, in order to provide an overall harmonious impression.²⁰ By praising the untouched nature of the evergreen trees, Grässer drifted apart from the artificial landscape recreations of the 19th century park-cemeteries, providing a new mode in cemetery design that was to find immediately international acclaim.²¹

[17] Thus, by the outbreak of war, the sacred forest became the paradigm for honoring those who had died for the homeland. Ideologically aligned with the emerging nationalism of the time, the grove was seen as a symbol of the individual and communal strength²², of the virtues inherent in the country's preindustrial past. In their realm, the fallen became part of nature's cycle of death and resurrection.²³

[18] Willy Lange (1864-1941), Garden Inspector of Dahlem, proposed in his book *Deutsche Heldenhaine*²⁴ the planting of an oak for every fallen soldier, grouped in geometrical groves that were to be installed in every German community. Though criticized in part for its cost and its extensive land-use²⁵, Lange's proposal found great acclaim among the general public and designers alike, inspiring initiatives like

¹⁸ Edelgard Voglmair, *Hans Grässer. Architekt und Städtischer Baubeamter in München 1860-1939*, Munich 1994, 45.

¹⁹ Voglmair, *Hans Grässer*, 17.

²⁰ Hans Grässer, *Über Friedhofanlagen und Grabdenkmale*, Munich 1910, 27.

²¹ Grässer's Waldfriedhof found both national and international acclaim and was the model for many woodland graveyards in Germany. Further, it was taken as a reference for the Woodland Cemetery Competition held in Stockholm in 1914-1915. The Competition became international in order to allow German architects to take part in it, some of the jury members were German and the winning entry by Eric Gunnar Asplund and Sigurd Lewerentz had great similarities with Grässer's design. See Nils Blanck, "Tävlan om utvidgning av Stockholms Södra Begravningsplats", in: *Arkitektur* V May (1915), 44.

²² Stefan Ankenbrand, *Heldenhaine, Heldenbäume*, Munich 1928, 28, cited in Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers*, 87.

²³ Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers*, 111.

²⁴ Willy Lange, *Deutsche Heldenhaine*, Leipzig, 1915.

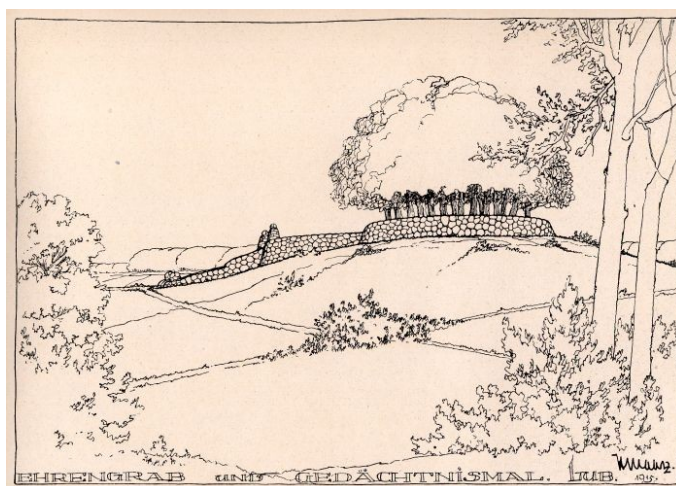
²⁵ Walter von Engelhardt, "Deutsche Heldenhaine", in: *Gartenkunst* 29 (1916), 30.

the Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Deutschlands Heldenhaine, whose sole aim was the realization of such memorial groves.

[19] The "Hain" as central remembrance symbol can also be traced in the many examples of war cemeteries that were compiled for the 1916 yearbook of the Werkbund. As German Bestelmeyer (1874-1942) – then professor at the Akademie der Künste in Berlin – points out in the chapter entitled *The Cemetery*, the military burial site should be a Garden of Eden that was to avoid the bleakness of the modern metropolitan cemetery with its endless accumulation of graves, "as if at a stonemason's yard".²⁶ In order to underscore the patriotic character of such a site, native plants played a crucial role in the spatial definition of the whole.

[20] The following chapter devoted to *Plant Decoration of the Fighter's Grave*, by Frankfurt's Garden Director Carl Heicke (1862-1938), further insisted on the tree and the grove as the most suitable means of honoring the war dead. Like all the other contributors of the Werkbund's yearbook, he pleaded for a simple, sober and uniform design of soldier's graves, recalling the regulations of the Ministry of War.²⁷ These regulations recommended the use of just a few species for trees, such as buckeye, acacia, beech, lime tree, elm or spruce, and just as few species of grave plantings, which were restricted to ivy, fern and heather. That is, a solemn, evergreen setting that remained immutable throughout time. The photographs and drawings that follow both articles show how groups of existing trees or newly planted groves were the favored backdrop for burial, often featuring a piece of native landscape as a tribute to the fallen.

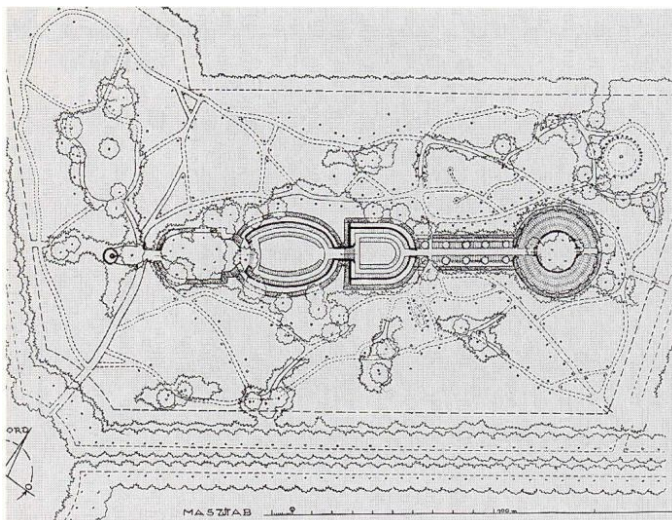
[21] Among the graveyards depicted in the Werkbund's yearbook was Harry Maasz's proposal for a memorial grave in the landscape (fig. 1) and his realization for the Ehrenfriedhof in Lübeck, both designed in 1915 (fig. 2).



1 "Hain" proposal for a soldiers' cemetery by Harry Maasz (reprod. from Peter Jessen [editorship], *Kriegergräber im Felde und daheim*, Munich 1917 [= *Jahrbuch des Deutschen Werkbundes* 1916/17], 119)

²⁶ German Bestelmeyer, "Der Friedhof", in: *Werkbund Jahrbuch* (1916), 21-23.

²⁷ Meinhold Lurz, *Kriegerdenkmäler in Deutschland*, Heidelberg 1985, vol. 3, 111.



2 Uniform tombs within the forest at the Ehrenfriedhof in Lübeck by Harry Maasz (reprod. from: *Deutsche Kunst und Dekoration* 36 (1915), 372)

While the sketch of the first example displayed a "Hain" on top of a hill, surrounded by a wall on a generic site, the photograph of the Ehrenfriedhof in Lübeck shows several clearings within an existing forest, in which groups of tombs rest uniformly on an ivy carpet.²⁸

[22] Though Harry Maasz' first intention in his design for Lübeck had been to layout an independent oak grove, he was finally asked to include the soldiers' graves within an existing wood on the outskirts of the city. Following the guidelines included in the Werkbund's yearbook, he outlined a sequence of three enclosed spaces within the forest, following a clear architectural geometry. The first clearing in this sequence was shaded by a group of oaks and it was enclosed by a beech hedge, which framed the place where memorial ceremonies took place. This forecourt led to an oval realm hosting the ivy-covered soldiers' graves in curved rows at the foot of a low retaining wall. At the top of this wall, a single band of blue and red Alp roses blossomed for four weeks in June, this being the only coloring in an otherwise sober green environment. The third clearing of the whole was designed much the same way, topping off this natural monument within nature.

[23] While Harry Maasz stuck to the standard principles of the Cemetery Reform Movement as they had been stated in the Werkbund's yearbook, another reformer, Leberecht Migge, seemed to be pushing these rules a little bit further. Highly involved with the allotment garden movement and later with the settlements movement, Migge was persuaded of the need for typification also in landscape issues²⁹, just as Hermann Muthesius had claimed for architecture within a crucial debate during the 1914 Werkbund conference.³⁰ Whereas some of the *Werkbund's*

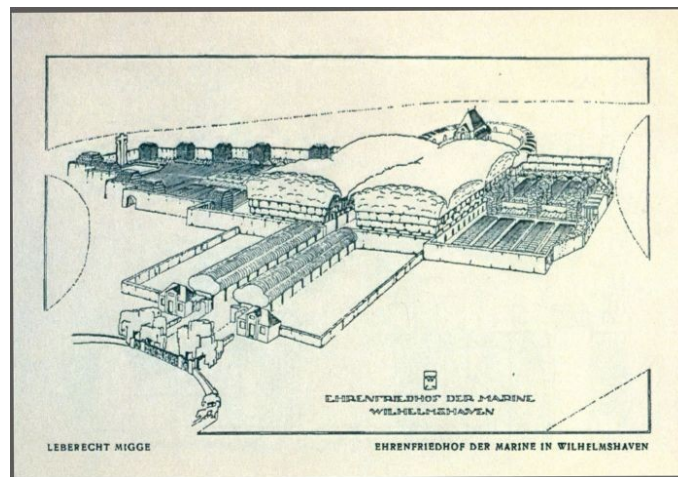
²⁸ Harry Maasz, "Lübeck's Ehren-Friedhof im Walde", in: *Deutsche Kunst und Dekoration* 36 (1915), 370-372.

²⁹ Leberecht Migge, *Deutsche Binnen-Kolonisation*, Berlin 1926.

³⁰ Hermann Muthesius, "Vortragsrede bei der Werkbundaussstellung in Cölln", in: Ulrich Conrads, ed., *Programme und Manifeste zur Architektur des 20. Jahrhunderts*, Berlin 1964, 40.

members, such as Henry van de Velde and Bruno Taut, interpreted this concept as an unacceptable constraint to the artist's freedom, Migge, like Muthesius, saw in it the key to the modern, functionalist approach now needed in both architectural and landscape design.

[24] A polemic writer, in his 1913 book *Gartenkultur des 20. Jahrhunderts*³¹, Leberecht Migge had conceived the city as a matrix of integrated typified green spaces that ranged from the large-scale of the public park to the small scale of the private garden. The cemetery was defined as one of these garden types, whose standard features were showcased by Migge in his scheme for the Wilhelmshaven Friedhof der Marine (fig. 3).³²



3 The "Hain" at the core of the Ehrenfriedhof der Marine in Wilhelmshaven by Leberecht Migge (reprod. from: *Die Kunst* 32 (1915), 389)

[25] First of all, the cemetery was placed within a larger public park of 72 hectares which included other activity areas aimed at fostering the social relations of the community, mainly military families of the German navy. Set within a system of canals to drain the marsh landscape, the park's activity areas included sport and festival fields, livestock meadows, wild preserve, tennis courts, a dairy garden, a wading pool, an open air museum and a set of the allotment gardens which were the figurehead of Migge's biodynamic theories for settlement reform. Thus, the cemetery became part of a more ambitious strategy that linked recreation, production and commemoration in a comprehensive design that was inspired by American models such as the Boston Park System.³³

[26] As for the war cemetery, Migge placed a "Hain" at its core, yet he distanced himself from other examples of that time by using lime trees instead of oaks, which he regarded as too monumental. Together with the birch tree bower of the urn grove, the simple volumes of the entrance pavilions and the chapel built the main

³¹ Leberecht Migge, *Gartenkultur des 20. Jahrhunderts*, Jena, 1913.

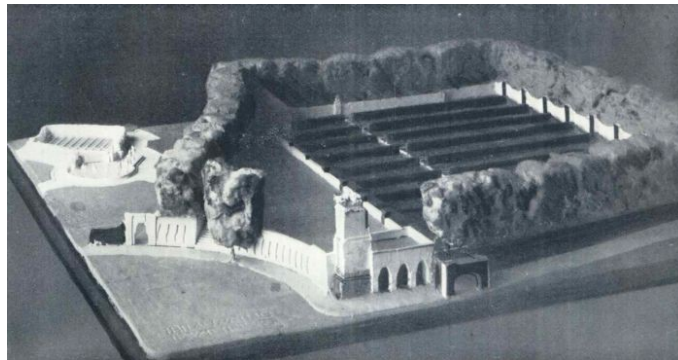
³² Leberecht Migge, "Der Ehrenfriedhof der Marine", in: *Die Kunst* 32 (1915), 389-392.

³³ Hayes, *When Modern was Green*, 84.

axis, which structured the site in an architectonic way that consciously rejected the artificial naturalism of landscape parks.

[27] Around this core, the graves were arranged in colorful rows, featuring uniform plantings of uncommon species for funeral purposes: roses, sunflowers, asters, etc. that recalled the productive landscape of plant nurseries. Therefore, Migge did not comply with the regulations issued by the German Ministry of War, which strictly forbid flowers, for German military cemeteries should not disguise the tragic of death but face it.³⁴

[28] While he was still involved in Wilhelmshaven construction, Migge put forward a scheme for the German soldier graves at Brussels-Evere (fig. 4). Being a German cemetery on foreign ground, his aim was now ideologically motivated to show other nations how Germans "fight the noble battle of the cultural domination in the world".³⁵



4 The soldier cemetery as a garden of tombs in Leberecht Migge's design for Brussels-Evere (reprod. from: *Der Städtebau* (1916), pl. 49)

[29] Again, Migge's cultural statement was based on the garden, a garden of tombs. As he claimed in an article on the subject,³⁶ the starting point of his proposal was the grave, which was to be laid-out as a flower bed. Recalling the comradeship of the battlefield, the graves of a group of soldiers would become a garden in which the individual identity was to be subordinated to the overall effect. The cemetery was thus a cluster of gardens separated by hedges of taxus and illex, in which the color of flowers played the main role. A pergola along the southern border allowed mourners to take a look at each garden individually, while a higher platform at the end offered a view of the whole plot, establishing an analogy with the individual's sacrifice within the higher collective purpose of the war. No trace of the "Hain" concept remained any longer.

³⁴ Franz Hallbaum, "Die deutsche Kriegsgräberstätte, ihr Wesen und ihre Form", in: *Kriegsgräberfürsorge* 12, (1932), Nr. 10, 147.

³⁵ Leberecht Migge, "Der Deutsche Ehrenfriedhof zu Brüssel-Evere", in: *Der Städtebau* (1916), 83-85.

³⁶ Leberecht Migge, "Deutsche Krieger-Friedhöfe", in: *Kunstwart und Kulturwart* 32 (1919), 12-14.

World War I German cemeteries: between functionalism and tradition

[30] Thus, we can conclude that the debate about the landscaping of World War I cemeteries shows the contradictory nature of the principles and means involved in the reform movements during the first decades of the 20th century. In the end, the transformative aim of cemetery reformers resorted to the traditional, pre-industrial symbol of the "Hain", in order to assert a national identity that was yet to define its final outline.

[31] As a building task, German war cemeteries offered the chance to put cemetery reform ideas into practice on a large scale. The sense of comradeship forged in the battlefield and the idea that every casualty was equally important favored the subordination of the individual expression to the overall effect. Thus, war cemeteries were an appropriate context to put typification and mass production into practice not only for economic reasons, but for symbolic purposes as well.

[32] This conservative revolution was followed more submissively by Harry Maasz, who adhered consequently to the design principles issued by the Ministry of War, with the tombs of the war heroes resting within the sober, evergreen setting of the forest. Leberecht Migge, on the other hand, made more innovative proposals by radically applying the functionalist principles of his biodynamical theories for the settlements to the concept of the cemetery. The war cemetery was a garden type to be set within the larger matrix of the metropolitan green system: a functional realm for commemoration that was to showcase the German cultural identity to the world,³⁷ not necessarily resorting to preindustrial symbolism.

Guest Editors of Special Issue

Christian Fuhrmeister and Kai Kappel (eds.), *War Graves, War Cemeteries, and Memorial Shrines as a Building Task, 1914-1989. Die Bauaufgabe Soldatenfriedhof/Kriegsgräberstätte zwischen 1914 und 1989*, in: *RIHA Journal* 0150-0176

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³⁷ Leberecht Migge, *Der Städtebau* (1916), 85.